

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3809
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 BEIRUT 1906

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: AMGT, PFOR, LE
SUBJECT: PARM - ANNUAL POLICY AND RESOURCE ASSESSMENT -
PART I (POLICY)

REF: (A) STATE 38356, (B) STATE 38338, (C) STATE 49794,
(D) STATE 47671, (E) CERP 0001

1. SUMMARY. I BELIEVE THE OVERRIDING US INTEREST IN LEBANON
IS IN A VIABLE POLITICAL ORDER, NOT ONLY FOR ITS OWN SAKE AND
FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE, BUT ALSO SO THAT LEBANON CAN CONTRIBUTE
TO RATHER THAN DETRACT FROM PROGRESS TOWARDS A MIDDLE
EAST SETTLEMENT. PEACE WILL REDUCE CHANCES OF DESTABILIZING
RADICALISM AND SOVIET PENETRATION IN THE AREA. ENDURING PEACE
IN LEBANON, HOWEVER, IS DEPENDENT ON A) A PALESTINIAN
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SOLUTION, B) CONTINUED COOPERATION AMONG SYRIA, EGYPT, AND
SAUDI ARABIA, C) ARAB WORLD POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT OF
THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT, AND D) THE SKILL AND DETERMINATION
OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT IN CONFRONTING AN
INTIMIDATING ARRAY OF INTERNAL POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL PROBLEMS. MOST DECISIVELY, AT LEAST IN THE
SHORT RUN, IT DEPENDS ON CONTINUED SYRIAN MILITARY

PRESENCE. OUR OBJECTIVES ARE TO PREVENT A RESUMPTION OF HOSTILITIES, TO PROMOTE AN INTERIM DOMESTIC POLITICAL SOLUTION (THAT IS, ONE WHICH DOES NOT AWAIT AN OVERALL PALESTINIAN SOLUTION, UNLESS THIS LATTER IS TO BE FOUND QUICKLY), TO SUPPORT AN ENDURING NEW LEBANESE POLITICAL FORMULA AND PROMOTE US COMMERCIAL AND CULTURAL INTERESTS. THE APPROPRIATE COURSES OF ACTION ARE, ESSENTIALLY, DIPLOMATIC AND POLITICAL SUPPORT OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT, MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO HELP REBUILD THE ARMY, AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. END SUMMARY.

2. US INTERESTS. I BELIEVE THE PRINCIPAL LONG-TERM US INTEREST IN LEBANON IS IN THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF A VIABLE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE AND SO THAT LEBANON CAN ONCE AGAIN BE AN ASSET TO RATHER THAN A BURDEN ON THE MIDDLE EAST REGION AND THE WORLD AS A WHOLE. PEACE IN LEBANON WILL CONTRIBUTE REGIONALLY TO PROGRESS ON ISRAEL-ARAB AND ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN SOLUTIONS (REF B, BROAD TRENDS FORECAST, PARA 12; REF C, NEA AREA SUPPLEMENT, PARAS 1 AND 6) BY REDUCING INTER-ARAB TENSIONS, BY ENABLING MIDDLE EAST LEADERS TO FOCUS MORE CLEARLY ON THE ISRAEL-ARAB AND ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN QUESTIONS, AND BY ELIMINATING ONE EXISTING SOURCE OF ARAB-ISRAEL TENSION (SOUTH LEBANON). RESTORATION OF LEBANON AS A NON-CONFRONTATION STATE, FURTHERMORE, WILL REVIVE THE EXAMPLE OF ISRAEL LIVING SUCCESSFUL AT PEACE WITH AT LEAST ONE OF ITS NEIGHBORS.

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3. PEACE IN LEBANON WILL ALSO INHIBIT THE GROWTH OF RADICALISM IN THE AREA. A WORKABLE PEACE WITHIN LEBANON WOULD TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THOSE SOCIAL INEQUALITIES AND CONFLICTS WHICH WERE IMPORTANT FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE ORIGINS OF THE WAR. THE RESTORATION OF A HEALTHY DOMESTIC POLITICAL MILIEU SHOULD REPLACE THE VOID TOO EASILY FILLED IN RECENT YEARS BY ASSORTED RADICALS INCLUDING COMMUNISTS, NASSERISTS AND PAN-ARAB SOCIALISTS AND WOULD DENY THE SOVIETS LIKELY TARGETS OF EXPLOITATION.

4. OVERVIEW. A PRINCIPAL ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR INHIBITING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A VIABLE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SYSTEM AND PEACE IN LEBANON IS THE CONTINUING PRESENCE OF SOME 350,000 PALESTINIANS. WHATEVER ITS ORIGINS, THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR LARGELY ENDED AS A STRUGGLE BETWEEN LEBANON'S CHRISTIANS AND A MILITANT PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT. THE NUMBER OF PALESTINIANS IS

NOT AS SIGNIFICANT AS THE HISTORICAL FACT THAT, OVER
ROUGHLY THE LAST 15 YEARS, THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN
LEBANON HAS METAMORPHOSIZED FROM A REFUGEE PRESENCE INTO
A FULL-BLOWN NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT WHICH HAS
TAKEN ON THE ATTRIBUTES OF A STATE IN ALMOST EVERY
RESPECT OTHER THAN UNDISPUTED TERRITORIAL
SOVEREIGNTY. IT IS BEYOND THE MEANS OF LEBANON ALONE,
UNDER ANY LIKELY POLITICAL SYSTEM, TO COPE IN AN
ENDURING FASHION WITH THIS PROBLEM. EVEN A TOTAL
MILITARY DEFEAT OF THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT AND A
RIGOROUS APPLICATION OF A NEW RESTRICTED STATUS FOR THE
PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON WITH FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
1969 CAIRO ACCORD WOULD SERVE ONLY TO SET BACK THE
CLOCK TEN YEARS. WITHOUT FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS
(BROAD TRENDS FORECAST, PARAS 1 AND 6) AND A
POLITICAL SOLUTION FOR THE PALESTINIANS, ITSELF
ACCEPTABLE TO THE MAJORITY OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE,
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AND SHORT OF THE UNREALISTIC ALTERNATIVES OF
EXPULSION OR GENOCIDE, THERE CAN BE NO ENDURING
PEACE IN LEBANON.

6. THE SUCCESS OF THE PRESENT SARKIS GOVERNMENT
(OR OF ANY SUCCESSOR GOVERNMENT, SHOULD IT COLLAPSE)
IN ESTABLISHING A VIABLE POLITICAL ORDER IN LEBANON
WILL LARGELY DEPEND ON THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC
SUPPORT OF NEIGHBORING STATES. SYRIA, EXERCISING AN
ARAB LEAGUE MANDATE, IS PROVIDING A MILITARY SECURITY
SHIELD BEHIND WHICH THE GOL HOPES TO WORK TOWARDS A
DOMESTIC POLITICAL SOLUTION. THE MAJOR ARAB OIL
PRODUCERS HOLD OUT THE PROMISE -- BUT STILL JUST THE
PROMISE-- OF MAJOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY ASSISTANCE.

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ISRAEL, HOWEVER, HAS ACTIVELY SUPPORTED ONE LEBANESE FACTION IN AN WAY WHICH COULD, IF CONTINUED IN THE FUTURE, UNRAVEL THE CHANCES OF THE GOL IN ESTABLISHING A VIABLE NEW DOMESTIC POLITICAL ORDER BY FOSTERING, INTENTIONALLY OR INADVERTENTLY, MAXIMALIST CHRISTIAN DEMANDS.

7. EVEN ASSUMING A COMPLETELY FAVORABLE REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT, POLITICAL RECONCILIATION IN LEBANON COULD FAIL ON ACCOUNT OF A NUMBER OF DOMESTIC PERILS. THE GOVERNMENT COULD BLUNDER, ALIENATING ONE FACTION OR ANOTHER, OR IT COULD SUFFER A LOSS OF NERVE. A POLITICAL FACTION (MOST LIKELY THE HARD-LINE CHRISTIAN GROUP) COULD ATTEMPT WHAT WOULD AMOUNT TO A COUP DETAT, OR SUCCEED IN A STRATEGY (ALREADY UNDERWAY SINCE SARKIS BECAME PRESIDENT) OF TAKING CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT. AT BEST, SUCH A STRATEGY
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WOULD PRESERVE PEACE THROUGH AN ESSENTIALLY MARONITE POLITICAL DICTATORSHIP (WHATEVER THE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS); AT WORST -- AND PROBABLY MORE LIKELY -- IT WOULD ENGENDER RENEWED CIVIL WAR AND A DISSOLUTION OF CURRENT SAUDI-SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN COOPERATION. FINALLY, ANY OF A NUMBER OF PROVOCATIVE ACTS, SUCH AS POLITICAL ASSASSINATION, COULD PRODUCE A LARGELY SPONTANEOUS REACTION WHICH WOULD END WHAT STILL IS REALLY A PROLONGED, EXTERNALLY IMPOSED CEASE-FIRE, NOT PEACE.

8. OF ALL THE RISKS TO PEACE IN LEBANON, PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT IS IN DAMASCUS. PRESERVATION OF THE CURRENT CEASE-FIRE, NOT TO MENTION REAL PROGRESS TOWARDS PEACE, IS TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF THE 30,000-MAN ARAB SECURITY FORCE, MADE UP LARGELY OF SYRIAN REGULAR ARMY UNITS. UNLESS AND

UNTIL EFFECTIVE LEBANESE NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES (THE ARMY AND THE POLICE) EMERGE, AND REAL PROGRESS BEGINS ON A NEW POLITICAL FORMULA, PEACE IN LEBANON CAN BE MAINTAINED ONLY BY THE SYRIAN ARMY. EVENTS QUITE UNRELATED TO LEBANON, FOR EXAMPLE A COUP IN DAMASCUS, WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT A WITHDRAWAL OF SYRIAN FORCES FROM LEBANON, COULD THUS GENERATE A RETURN TO CIVIL WAR IN LEBANON.

9. OBJECTIVES. SUCCESS IN OUR OVERRIDING OBJECTIVE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, A SETTLEMENT OF THE ISRAEL-ARAB CONFLICT (BROAD TRENDS FORECAST, PARA 12-H) WILL GREATLY REDUCE A PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF CONFLICT IN LEBANON, THUS CONTRIBUTING DIRECTLY AND PERHAPS DECISIVELY TO OUR PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE IN LEBANON, NAMELY THE RETURN OF A VIABLE LEBANESE POLITICAL SYSTEM. THIS ASSUMES THAT THE SETTLEMENT WE SEEK IN THE MIDDLE EAST INCLUDES A POLITICAL FORMULA ACCEPTABLE TO THE PALESTINIANS, THUS DEPRIVING THE PALESTINIAN POLITICAL AND MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON OF ITS
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RAISON D'ETRE.

10. CONVERSELY, PROGRESS ON AN OVERALL MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT COULD BE COMPLICATED BY UNFAVORABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON, ALTHOUGH IT IS THE ABSENCE OF A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT WHICH IS AT THE ROOT OF THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR, RATHER THAN THE REVERSE. AT THE SAME TIME, WE HAVE OTHER INTERESTS DEPENDENT ON PEACE IN LEBANON (PARAS 2 AND 3 ABOVE). THUS, REGARDLESS OF MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS, US OBJECTIVES IN LEBANON ARE TO PROMOTE:

A. INDEFINITE PROLONGATION OF THE CEASE-FIRE, WHICH BEGAN WITH THE DEPLOYMENT OF SYRIAN TROOPS THROUGHOUT LEBANON NORTH OF THE "RED LINE" IN NOVEMBER 1976;

B. AN INTERIM POLITICAL FORMULA IN LEBANON PRIOR TO DEFINITIVE RESOLUTION OF THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION (THIS ASSUMES THAT PROGRESS ON A MIDDLE EAST SOLUTION WILL NOT BE SO SWIFT AS TO OBIVIATE THE NEED FOR AN INTERIM SOLUTION IN LEBANON);

C. AN ENDURING LEBANESE-LEBANESE POLITICAL FORMULA FOR THE PERIOD AFTER A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT;

D. ASSUMING THE CEASE-FIRE IN LEBANON HOLDS, AND EVOLVES GRADUALLY INTO A COUNTRY AT PEACE WITH ITSELF, MAXIMALIZATION OF US EXPORTS TO LEBANON.

11. COURSES OF ACTION AND ISSUES, WE HAVE CHOSEN TO PURSUE PEACE IN LEBANON (OBJECTIVES A, B, AND C ABOVE) THROUGH A POLICY OF SUPPORT OF LEBANESE NATIONAL UNITY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, AND SUPPORT OF THE LEGITIMACY OF THE EXISTING DULY-CONSTITUTED GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENT ELIAS SARKIS. THIS CONTINUES TO BE OUR BEST OPTION. IT IMPLIES, HOWEVER, VARIOUS COURSES
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OF ACTION, WHICH WE HAVE SO FAR PURSUED WITH SOMEWHAT UNEVEN DILIGENCE:

A. DIPLOMATIC AND POLITICAL SUPPORT OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT. WE SHOULD CONTINUE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT FOR THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT. WE HAVE BEEN QUITE GOOD AT THIS, WHICH COSTS US LITTLE. WE SHOULD ENCOURAGE SUPPORT OF THE SARKS GOVERNMENT ABROAD. IN THE CASE OF SYRIA THERE IS, SO FAR, NO PROBLEM. NEVERTHELESS, CERTAIN ASPECTS OF SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON, PARTICULARLY THEIR DEALINGS WITH THE KFUR FRONT AND WITH THE PALESTINIANS, WILL REQUIRE WATCHING. THE REST OF THE ARAB WORLD (EXCEPT IRAQ AND LIBYA) IS UNITED IN ITS SUPPORT OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT (AND OF THE SYRIAN MANDATE), AND WE SHOULD CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS TO PRESERVE THIS SITUATION. BEYOND MERE GENERALIZED STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT, WE SHOULD SUPPORT THE SPECIFIC POLICIES OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT, AND, WHEN SOUGHT AND WE FIND IT HELPFUL TO DO SO, OFFER CONSTRUCTIVE ADVICE TO THE GOVERNMENT. OUR SUPPORT OF THE POLICIES OF THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT BOTH REGIONALLY AND INTERNALLY IN LEBANON. INTERNALLY, OUR WORD CARRIES PARTICULAR WEIGHT WITH THE CHRISTIAN "LEBANESE FRONT" WHICH, DESPITE THE LACK OF EVIDENCE IN RECENT YEARS, STILL REGARDS US AS A SPECIAL FRIEND AND PROTECTOR.

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B. MILITARY ASSISTANCE, DESPITE THE PROJECTED
GENERAL REDUCTION OF US ARMS SALES (BROAD TRENDS
FORECAST, PARAS 1 AND 9), I BELIEVE IT IS IN THE
INTERESTS OF THE US AND OF LEBANON TO PROVIDE
SUBSTANTIAL (IN THE LEBANESE CONTEXT) MILITARY
ASSISTANCE TO THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT. LEBANON DOES
NOT AND CANNOT OFFER ANY MILITARY THREAT TO EITHER
OF ITS NEIGHBORS, SYRIA AND ISRAEL, BOTH OF WHICH
ARE IMPORTANT MIDDLE-LEVEL MILITARY POWERS. TO
MAINTAIN INTERNAL SECURITY, HOWEVER, LEBANON WILL NEED
GRANT MILITARY ASSISTANCE, BOTH IN EQUIPMENT AND
TRAINING.

C. ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT'S
POLITICAL STRATEGY IS PREDICATED IN PART ON THE
PROPOSITION THAT PROGRESS IN RECONSTRUCTION WILL ITSELF
CONTRIBUTE TO CONSOLIDATING THE PEACE AND CREATING
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CONDITIONS FAVORABLE TO POLITICAL RECONCILIATION, AND
WE AGREE WITH THIS PRAGMATIC APPROACH. IN SUPPORT OF
IT, THE US SHOULD PURSUE THE PROGRAM OF ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE IT HAS ALREADY BEGUN, AND EXPAND IT IN FY 78
AND FY 79 ON THE BASIS OF ANALYSIS OF NEED, THE
POLITICAL PROSPECTS OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT AND FOREIGN
ASSISTANCE FROM OTHER SOURCES. WE SHOULD ALSO
ENCOURAGE THE OTHER ARAB STATES TO BE FORTHCOMING IN
GIVING ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON.

D. CULTURAL. THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF
BEIRUT (AUB), INCLUDING THE HOSPITAL AND MEDICAL
SCHOOL, HAS BEEN THE LEADING AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL

INSTITUTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST FOR MANY YEARS.
DURING THE NEXT TWO YEARS, THE UNIVERSITY WILL BE
PASSING THROUGH A DIFFICULT PERIOD, FINANCIALLY AND
ACADEMICALLY, AS IT SEEKS TO RECOVER FROM THE
"EVENTS" IN LEBANON UNDER A NEW PRESIDENT. THE USG
SHOULD CONTINUE ITS SUPPORT FOR THE UNIVERSITY AND
SEEK WAYS TO PERSUADE OTHERS, BOTH IN THE US AND THE
MIDDLE EAST, TO CONTRIBUTE.

12. CONCLUSION: THE ABOVE HAS BEEN DRAFTED AND
CLEARED BY OUR COUNTRY TEAM, EVEN THOUGH PUT IN FIRST
PERSON. IT IS STRAIGHTFORWARD AND OBVIOUS. I AM
EXPANDING ON CERTAIN POINTS IN SEPARATE MESSAGES, NONE
OF WHICH WILL SURPRISE THE DEPARTMENT. BASIC
ASSUMPTIONS TO OUR DELIBERATIONS HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING:

A. WHILE THE SHORT TERM IS GOING TO BE DIFFICULT,
LEBANON WILL EVENTUALLY RIGHT ITSELF. THIS IS A MATTER
OF PROFESSIONAL OPTIMISM RATHER THAN DEEP CONVICTION.
INGREDIENTS FOR ANOTHER EXPLOSION AND DISSOLUTION OF
LEBANON ARE PRESENT. THEY ARE UNDER CONTROL FOR THE
MOMENT, BUT IT WILL TAKE SKILL AND DETERMINATION TO
KEEP THEM THAT WAY.

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B. USG HAS IMPORTANT STAKE IN CONTINUED EXISTENCE
OF UNIFIED AND STABLE LEBANON AND WILL BE PREPARED TO
CONTINUE CONTRIBUTING ACTIVELY TO THIS END.

C. WE WILL HAVE TO MAINTAIN FAIRLY HIGH PROFILE.
LEBANESE EXPECT US TO PLAY A SPECIAL ROLE HERE AND WE
HAVE LITTLE ALTERNATIVE IF WE WANT TO INFLUENCE EVENTS
IN THIS COUNTRY.

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